

Veterans' health matters

Use Medications Safely and Wisely

It's estimated that more than 3.6 billion prescriptions are filled annually in the United States. Even though prescriptions are written under the care of a medical provider, you as the patient have the most important role in their safe use.

A few simple steps can be taken to ensure the safe use of medications.

- Before you start a new medicine, make sure your health care provider and pharmacist have a complete list of all your medications, so they can check for drug interactions. This includes over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, herbs, diet supplements and natural remedies.
- Ask if your medicine has any known interaction with foods or drinks. Common drinks such as grapefruit juice can interact with certain medications.
- Tell your health care provider and pharmacist if you have experienced adverse drug reactions in the past, or have any known drug allergies.
- Read and follow all medication labels. Drug regimens often require tablets be split or taken multiple times a day.

- Know why you need a drug before you use it.
- Ask your provider before you stop your medication. Some drugs can cause harm if stopped abruptly.
- Check with your pharmacist, doctor or local Department of Environmental Health or county Household Hazardous Waste Program for safe medication disposal alternatives, rather than discarding them in the trash or down the drain.

If your prescriptions provide for refills, it's your responsibility to order them in a timely manner. It is recommended that you order your refills at least 14 days before your medicine runs out, and be sure to allow for vacations and holidays. For your convenience, the VA offers three options when ordering refills.

Refill by Phone

Using a touch-tone telephone, dial the prescription refill phone number located on the label of your medication bottle and follow the voice instructions.

1. Enter your full Social Security number, followed by the “#” (pound) sign.
2. Press Option “2” for Pharmacy information.
3. Press Option “1” to order refills.

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VA National News

President Announces Enhanced Veteran Benefits

In April, President Barack Obama, along with Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki and Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, announced that VA and DOD have taken the first step in creating a Joint Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record – a comprehensive system that allows the streamlined transition of health care records between DOD and the VA.

The Departments will work together to define and build a system that will ultimately contain administrative and medical information from the day an individual enters military service throughout his or her military career, and after leaving the military.

Creation of this Joint Virtual Lifetime Record will take the next step to delivering seamless, high-quality care, and serve as

a model for the nation. At the announcement, President Obama said that the quality of care veterans receive should never be hindered by budget delays and that he had worked with Secretary Shinseki to support advanced funding of veterans' medical care that will provide a timely and predictable flow of VA health care funding from year to year.

He noted that his proposed FY 2010 budget for VA will:

- increase funding by \$25 billion above the baseline over the next five years.
- dramatically increase funding for veterans' health care.
- expand eligibility, by 2013, for veterans' health care to more than 500,000 veterans who were previously denied care.
- enhance outreach and services related to mental health care and cognitive injuries, including post-traumatic stress disorder

and traumatic brain injury, with a focus on access for veterans in rural areas.

- invest in better technology to deliver services and benefits to veterans with the quality and efficiency they deserve.
- provide greater benefits to veterans who are medically retired from service.
- combat homelessness by safeguarding vulnerable veterans.
- facilitate timely implementation of the comprehensive education benefits veterans earn through their dedicated military service.

Study Cites VA for Excellence in Electronic Health Records

A recent study in the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine* singles out the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for its successful implementation of a comprehensive system of electronic health records.

Use Medications Safely

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4. Enter your prescription number only (no letters), followed by the “#” (pound) sign.

Refill by Mail

If you obtain your original prescription from a VA facility, and it is eligible for refill, you will have received a refill request form and a return mailing label with your prescription. Simply fill out and sign the refill form and mail it to the address shown on the label.

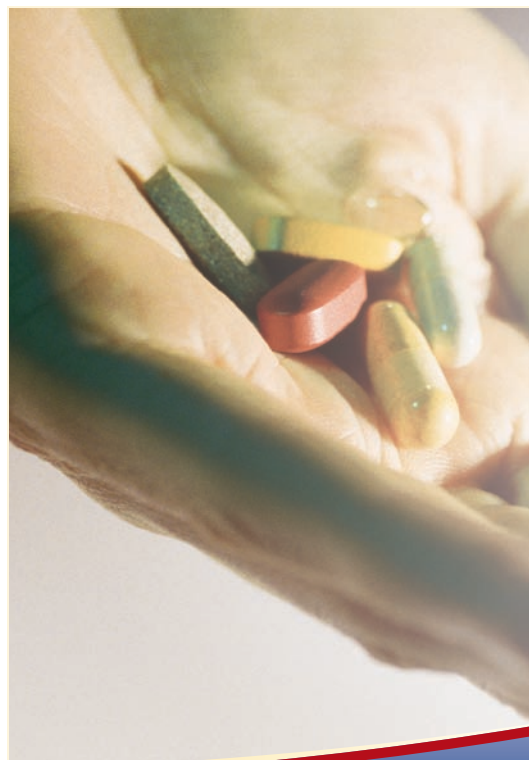
Refill Online

The VA's My HealtheVet system,

which connects with the VA's medical record system, now offers a secure online prescription service. When you order a refill via that service, your request is automatically routed to VA's computer system to be filled, and the refill is sent directly to your home.

To access this online service, you must be a registered user of My HealtheVet. To register, please visit the My HealtheVet web site at www.myhealth.va.gov.

Your role in ensuring the safe use of medication is critical. Never hesitate to ask your health care provider or pharmacist if you have questions. ■



VA National News

The study's authors, led by Dr. Ashish K. Jha of Harvard University, noted that VA's use of electronic health records has significantly enhanced the quality of patient care. They also found that only 1.5 percent of U.S. hospitals have comprehensive electronic health records; adding VA hospitals to the analyses doubled that number.

"VA hospitals have used electronic health records for more than a decade with dramatic associated improvements in clinical quality," the study's authors wrote.

VA clinicians began using computerized patient records in the mid-1990s for everything from recording examinations by doctors to displaying results of lab tests and x-rays. Patient records are available 100 percent of the time to VA health care workers, compared to 60 percent when VA relied on paper records.

The authors of the NEJM article are the latest to praise VA for its technology and commitment to patient safety. In 2006, VA received the prestigious "Innovations in American Government" Award from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government for its advanced electronic health records and performance measurement system.

Post-9/11 GI Bill Adopted

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has announced that Veterans can begin submitting applications online for the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

Veterans, service members, reservists and National Guard members with active duty since Sept. 10, 2001, may be eligible for this benefit. Veterans will remain eligible for benefits for 15 years from the date of last discharge or release from a period of active

duty of at least 90 continuous days.

Eligible applicants must have served for an aggregate period of at least 90 days since Sept. 10, 2001, or served at least 30 continuous days on active duty since Sept. 10, 2001, and received a discharge for disability. Prospective beneficiaries may apply online through the GI Bill web site at www.gibill.va.gov.

Qualified Veterans will receive a "Certification of Eligibility," as well as additional information regarding benefits they may qualify for under the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which will become effective on August 1, 2009.

Information about the new program and VA's other educational benefits may be obtained through the GI Bill web site, or by calling 1-888-GIBILL1 (1-888-442-4551). ■

Dangers of Antibiotic Resistance

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), antibiotic resistance is one of the world's most pressing public health problems. This condition occurs when bacteria change in some way that reduces or eliminates the effectiveness of drugs, chemicals or other agents designed to cure or prevent infections. Widespread overuse of antibiotics is fueling an increase in antibiotic resistant bacteria. So, the next time you really need an antibiotic for a bacterial infection, it may not work.

If you have a cold or flu, antibiotics won't work for you!

Colds and flu are caused by viruses, not bacteria. Taking antibiotics when you have a virus may do more harm than good. Get smart about when antibiotics are appropriate. Taking them for viral infections, such as a cold, cough, the flu, or acute bronchitis:

- will not cure the infection;
- will not keep other people from getting sick;
- will not help you feel better; and
- may cause unnecessary and harmful side effects.

What Not To Do

- Do not demand antibiotics when a healthcare provider says they are not needed. They will not

help treat your infection.

- Do not take an antibiotic for a viral infection, like a cold, a cough, or the flu.
- Do not take antibiotics prescribed for someone else. The antibiotic may not be appropriate for your illness.
- Taking the wrong medicine may delay correct treatment and allow bacteria to multiply.

If your healthcare provider prescribes an antibiotic for you:

- Do not skip doses.
- Do not save any of the antibiotics for the next time you get sick. ■

VA facility highlights

sierra nevada

VASNHCS to Expand in Rural Areas

VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System (VASNHCS) covers an area of approximately 69,000 square miles and includes 13 highly rural/frontier counties and five rural counties. Approximately 60 percent of the total population of enrollees lives in rural or frontier counties, as compared to the national average of 40 percent.

Our goal at VASNHCS is to improve access and quality

of health care for veterans in these rural and geographically isolated areas. In support of VHA's goal to increase the convenience of care for thousands of veterans living in rural areas, VASNHCS plans to open a new Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Susanville, California, as well as a Rural Outreach Clinic in Winnemucca, Nevada. VASNHCS's Director, Dr. Kurt Schlegelmilch, supports VA's commitment to provide world class care and service to America's heroes, regardless of their address.

The Susanville CBOC, to be named VA Diamond View CBOC, will serve the Lassen, Modoc and Plumas county areas. The clinic will provide non-emergent primary care, mental health, and ancillary support services during regular business hours (Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.). The clinic is scheduled to be operational by early 2010.

The Winnemucca Outreach Clinic will provide similar services on a contract basis with limited hours and is scheduled to be open by the fourth quarter of 2009. ■

pacific islands

New Nursing Academy Coming to Hawaii

On April 9, VA Pacific Islands Health Care System (PIHCS) received word that Hawaii was selected as a site for a VA Nursing Academy, starting in academic year 2009-2010. The Nursing Academy program was established in 2007 to enhance nursing education, practice and research, and to increase recruitment

and retention of nurses in the VA. VA PIHCS will work collaboratively with the University of Hawaii School of Nursing. VA will fund some faculty positions at the school and at the PIHCS. Students will receive some of their clinical training at the Honolulu VA Medical Center.

The collaboration is really a triple one, as our DoD partner,

Tripler Army Medical Center, is also part of the academy and part of the educational experience offered. This is the result of a dedicated effort over the past two years by PIHCS staff and others. The results will be more compassionate, highly-trained nurses serving the health care needs of our veterans, through the enhancement of their professional and scholarly development. ■

san francisco

Residents Welcome New Breakfast Buffet

"Two thumbs up!" is the vote on the new Continental Breakfast now offered weekly in the San Francisco VA Medical Center's Community Living Center (CLC), as part of a new program to enhance patient satisfaction. When the CLC Resident Council veterans asked for a lighter breakfast later in the morning, the facility's Cultural Change Committee proposed the breakfast buffet as a way to provide a more resident-centered meal.

Kevin Rayburn, RD, CDE, Administrative Section Chief, Nutrition & Food Service and Dietetic Interns, designed the buffet to enhance the aesthetics of eating. Instead of having breakfast served on a tray, residents arrive at the dining room between 9 and 10 a.m. to eat in a more social, drop-in type environment. Residents choose from a buffet of assorted fruits, hot and cold cereals, breads and muffins, hard-boiled eggs, yogurt and granola. The



VA Employee Sabina Jackson serves the Continental Breakfast that has been a big success at the CLC.

smell of coffee and toast wafts down the hallway, and piano playing and singing, voluntarily provided by Veron David, CNA, Escort Service, adds to the ambiance.

The new program has been an overwhelming

success, as measured by the satisfaction of the CLC residents. As one veteran said, "This is the greatest morale booster I've had since I arrived. I usually eat in my room, but this got me out and eating with my buddies." ■

PTSD Program Benefits from Canine Therapy

The Trauma Recovery Programs on the Menlo Park campus is receiving tremendous success with a new recreation therapy program called, Paws For Purple Hearts. The program pairs service members with gentle canines from the Assistance Dog Institute (ADI) in Santa Rosa, Calif., a non-profit organization. ADI pioneered the training of service dogs to aid

people with varying conditions and disabilities.

Rick Yount, a social worker with the Assistance Dog Institute, first saw the potential for his program to help war veterans two ways, engaging them as dog trainers who need emotional catharsis, and ultimately providing service dogs for



disabled vets, many in wheelchairs, who need help getting around.

Although less than a year old, the program already has VA staffers speculating that it could become a national model, a new treatment for Post Traumatic

Stress, which could be extended to other VA facilities. ■

VA Receives Recognition for Student Programs

VA Central California Healthcare System has been named one of five recipients of the 2009 William F. Noli Award for outstanding service and support to career technical education and the Fresno Regional Occupations Program (ROP). The Award is named in memory of a former Fresno County Deputy Superintendent, a champion for career technical

education. VA was nominated by the principal of Duncan Polytechnical High School and instructors of the Fresno ROP classroom located at VA.

There are four classroom instructors on duty each day to assist 225 students with learning opportunities. Other high school programs at VA include the Fresno Unified School District 'Vocational Program' and the Sunnyside High School 'Doctors Academy.' This is the second Noli Award the Fresno

VA has received since working with the Fresno ROP in 1998.

The Fresno VA has also received the Fresno Compact 'School to Business' Award twice in the last 10 years, most recently in July 2008. VA employees are extremely proud of their close relationship to the high school training programs, and realize their time and commitment to students foster interest in future healthcare careers, both in VA and in the local community. ■

New Psychiatric Care Unit Opens

On March 20, more than 200 people attended the long-awaited grand opening of the new in-patient Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit at the Sacramento VA Medical Center. In his opening remarks, Brian O'Neill, M.D., Director, Northern California Health Care System, said, "We cover 40,000 square miles and 17 counties, and this is the first in-patient VA Psychiatric Care Unit in our system. Our goal is to serve our

Veterans in Northern California closer to their home and families."

The Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit will provide comprehensive, compassionate and effective treatment to Veterans with mental health needs. The ward is a 10-bed secured unit that offers an innovative and interactive treatment program which encourages Veterans to learn about their illness, medications and ways to manage their symptoms, while developing and maintaining healing partnerships.

"This is an innovative program that will help improve the

standard of care for our Veterans," said Dr. Ladi Kukoyi, Behavioral Sciences Medical Director of Inpatient Psychiatry. "Our Associate Chief Of Staff, Director of Mental Health, Dr. Maga Jackson-Triche, heard of this model from the Cincinnati VA and brought the vision to us here. With hard work by our excellent team, we were able to adapt the program locally and integrate new additions to customize the model and make it work for us here." ■

A Laughing Matter:

"All my life I've been terrible at remembering people's names. I once introduced a friend of mine as Martini. Her name was actually Olive."
~ Tallulah Bankhead

"I'm at that age where if you flattened out all the wrinkles I'd be seven feet tall."
~ Robert Orben

"If it weren't for Philo T. Farnsworth, inventor of television, we'd still be eating frozen radio dinners."
~ Johnny Carson

"I have enough money to last me the rest of my life - unless I buy something."
~ Jackie Mason

"My doctor is wonderful. Once, when I couldn't afford an operation, he touched up the X-rays."
~ Joey Bishop

"I'm tired of all this nonsense about beauty being only skin-deep. That's deep enough. What do you want, an adorable pancreas?"
~ Jean Kerr

"I wonder if other dogs think poodles are members of a weird religious cult."
~ Rita Rudner

"Red meat is not bad for you. Now, blue-green meat - that's bad for you!"
~ Tom Smothers ■

WORD SEARCH

P	P	W	I	L	N	T	K	M	E	I	N	O	V	Q	P	D	J	T	M	P	K	H
R	R	P	W	N	S	R	V	O	M	B	R	G	W	X	G	H	E	S	U	N	C	F
O	O	L	R	H	T	R	E	S	I	S	T	A	N	C	E	J	R	E	W	L	I	W
G	V	Y	E	E	X	E	V	G	T	X	P	O	A	B	B	J	C	Q	P	P	Y	Y
R	I	T	U	M	S	P	R	Y	I	B	P	G	L	F	E	L	Q	D	O	M	A	Y
A	D	C	U	X	H	C	P	A	H	M	G	K	X	I	A	G	W	V	E	E	N	N
M	E	L	L	B	S	O	R	U	C	W	E	M	D	C	D	J	B	S	G	D	T	Z
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U	F	R	R	E	S	P	O	N	S	I	B	I	L	I	T	Y	B	D	I	N	C	Q
M	F	U	N	D	I	N	G	Y	F	W	P	H	A	R	M	A	C	I	S	T	A	I

☐ PRESCRIPTION
☐ MEDICATION
☐ PHARMACIST
☐ INTERACTION

☐ REGIMEN
☐ REFILL
☐ PROVIDER
☐ FUNDING

☐ CLINICAL
☐ SAFETY
☐ RESISTANCE
☐ ANTIBIOTIC

☐ PROGRAM
☐ INFECTION
☐ DOCTOR
☐ RESPONSIBILITY

An Open Letter from Secretary Shinseki

My name is Ric Shinseki, and I am a Veteran. For me, serving as Secretary of Veterans Affairs is a noble calling. It provides me the opportunity to give back to those who served with and for me during my 38 years in uniform, and those on whose shoulders we all stood as we grew up in the profession of arms.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has a solemn responsibility to all of you, today and in the future, as more Veterans join our ranks and enroll to secure the benefits and services they have earned. I am fully committed to fulfilling President Obama's vision for transforming our department so that it will be well-positioned to perform this duty even better during the 21st Century.

We welcome the assistance and advice of our Veterans Service Organizations, other government departments and agencies, Congress, and all VA stakeholders as we move forward, ethically and transparently, so that Veterans and citizens can understand our efforts.

Creating that vision for transforming the VA into a 21st Century organization requires a comprehensive review of our department. We approach that review understanding that Veterans are central to everything VA does. We know that results count, that the department will be measured by what we do, not what we promise, and that our best days as an organization supporting Veterans are ahead of us.

We will fulfill President Lincoln's charge to care for "... him, who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan ..." by redesigning and reengineering ourselves for the future.

Transforming any institution is supremely challenging; I know this from my own experience in leading large, proud, complex, and high-performing organizations through change. But the best organizations must be prepared to meet the challenging times, evolving technology and, most importantly, evolving needs of clients. Historically, organizations that are unwilling or unable to change soon find themselves irrelevant.

You and your needs are not irrelevant. Veterans are our clients, and delivering the highest quality care and services in a timely, consistent and fair manner is a VA responsibility. I take that responsibility seriously and have charged all of the department's employees for their best efforts and support every day to meet our obligations to you.

Our path forward is challenging, but the President and Congress support us. They have asked us to do this well – for you. Veterans are our sole reason for existence and our number one priority – bar none. I look forward to working together with all VA employees to transform our department into an organization that reflects the change and commitment our country expects and our Veterans deserve.

Thank you, and God bless our military, our Veterans, and our Nation. ■



*General Eric K. Shinseki,
(US Army, Ret.) Secretary
of Veterans Affairs*

Dear Veteran, Play It Safe!

The VA wants you to understand WHY and HOW to take your medications. That's why we will:

When Leaving a Clinic Appointment ...

- give you an up-to-date list of your current medications – if your doctor has changed them.
- provide a current list of your medications to an outside physician – if your VA doctor has referred you to one.
- ask if you want a list of your current medications sent to a healthcare provider outside the VA.

Upon Hospital Discharge ...

- give you a list of your current medications.
- ask if you have any questions about your medications.
- ask if you want a list of your medications sent to a healthcare provider outside the VA.

At Any Time ...

- answer your concerns or questions about your medications. Just ask your VA doctor, nurse, or pharmacist for an explanation.
- ask you to notify your doctor or nurse if you are taking medications prescribed by a physician outside the VA.
- provide you with a current list of your medications, which is available to you by logging onto the VA My HealtheVet web site at www.myhealth.va.gov.

Remember, PLAY IT SAFE!

- Actively participate in YOUR care.
- Keep a current list of your medications on you at all times.
- Share your list of current medications with your healthcare providers. ■

Kerri Childress, Editor
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Eureka, CA 95501
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VA SAN BRUNO OPC

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VA CENTRAL CALIFORNIA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

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VA SIERRA NEVADA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

IOANNIS A. LOUGARIS VA MEDICAL CENTER

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VA CARSON VALLEY OPC

925 Ironwood Drive, Suite 2102
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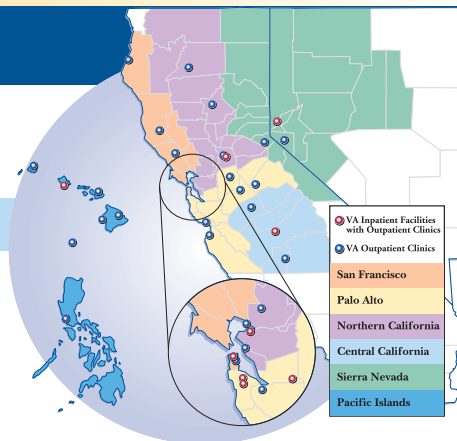
VA PACIFIC ISLANDS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

SPARK M. MATSUNAGA VA MEDICAL CENTER

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(808) 433-0600

VA PTSD RESIDENTIAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

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VA AMERICAN SAMOA CBOC

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